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ABSTRACT

Translators and interpreters are not currently trained as professionals, but taught a "do-as-I-do" system inherited from the medieval guilds. Most are self-made, having acquired technique and applied it to languages already known. However, there is now enough known about mediated interlingual communication to teach translators and interpreters how to be successful practitioners. Training should include the following: the general theory of language, including universal principles of human communication, linguistic communication, oral vs. written communication, and mediated interlingual communication; and discourse analysis, including quantity, cooperation, idiomaticity, and situationality. Arguments against teaching theory to translators and interpreters include that they are arts requiring natural talent that can not be taught, and that writing and speaking are natural, not scientific, pursuits. The intellectual process of translation must be the focus of translator training, which should use practical models emphasizing deverbalization and theoretical conceptualization. Students should also be encouraged to broaden their knowledge base. Interpreter training should focus on the uses of oral language, maximizing extra-linguistic cues, and intelligibility. In addition, typology of oral texts, anatomy of the phonatory organs, and practical experience are essential. It is time for the translating and interpreting professions to develop professional training. (MSE)

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TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS. PROFESSIONALS OR SHOEMAKERS?

by Sergio Viaggio
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This is not the paper I originally envisaged: Upon receiving the abstracts of my fellow presenters, I realised they were going to say pretty much what I had in mind; I have therefore switched directions and decided to talk about what translator and interpreter formation should be about. The original title bore little connection to what follows, so, at the suggestion of Jean Delisle, it has been changed.

Unlike most established professions, ours is still trying to find its rightful place. Translatology is still a contested neologism, translation studies are quite a recent endeavour; most of our Galens and Archimedeses, such as Nida and Vinay, are still alive and active, T&I schools are a latter day phenomenon and the didactics of both disciplines is only now becoming an object of study. No wonder, then, that teachers are often mere practitioners perpetuating the dubious "do-as-I-do" system inherited from the medieval guilds.

Most translators and interpreters the world over refuse to conceive that their practice can be conceptualised or that such a conceptualisation could help improve it. Translators and interpreters read as much about T&I as shoemakers about shoemaking; if they consider themselves professionals, it tends to be on the basis of their otherwise unconnected college degrees. Indeed, most interpretation courses are postgraduate, an afterthought, as it were, to those otherwise unconnected degrees. It is time our institutions realised that training and forming are different things. Doctors are not merely <u>trained</u>, nurses are. If T&I institutions want to produce professionals with comparable knowledge and skills, then they have to form their students along parallel criteria.

Both translators and interpreters specialise at mediating in interlingual communication. This basic feature, distinguishing the twain from the rest of mortals, is a bond stronger than the differences between oral and written communication rending them apart. Whether written or oral, simultaneous or consecutive, judicial or literary, mediated interlingual communication is governed by a series of principles all practitioners ought to know. Unfortunately, it is not always the case. I think the answer lies above all in the fact that, as a rule, translators and interpreters, at least until fairly recently in Europe, and to this very day in the rest of the world, are basically self-made. Somehow or other, mostly by dint of cosmopolitanism and transhumance, they have acquired a useful <u>savoir faire</u>, a technique, a flair to put to profitable use languages picked up even unintentionally.

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If not long ago, the essence of both disciplines had to be gleaned through actual observation of successful practitioners, that cannot be any longer the case. Medicine is not developed merely by closely watching successful physicians anymore than the boundaries of musicology are pushed by mere listening to successful instrumentalists. Now we do know enough about T&I, i.e. about mediated interlingual communication, to be unabashedly prescriptive. We can teach our students how to <u>be</u> successful practitioners.

We should start precisely by explaining that T&I are mediated communication, and therefore that the general laws of communication obtain supreme. Then, and only then, comes the rest. Our students must understand that, even though they are to work with objects linguistic, they are not supposed to become sheer language manipulators. Languages are indeed tools, but as with any tool, there is little purpose in learning to use it unless one knows beforehand what it is actually used for. Languages are used as vehicles of communicative intentions, as objective crystallisers of thought and emotion. They are the pet creatures of man's second signal system, our specific way of condensing, storing, retrieving, and transmitting experience. But in order precisely to understand them as such, a merely instrumental view of language must give way to a view of "language as an object of scientific thought - not a vehicle, but a source of knowledge in itself." (Cortese 1989, p. 143.)

The first thing to teach, therefore, is the General Anatomy of language; what it is, how it has evolved, how it works. Next, its relationship with thought. The students must be taught the universal principles of 1) human communication, 2) linguistic communication, 3) oral as opposed to written linguistic communication and 4) mediated interlingual communication. The practice of T&I ought always to be the application of such principles, paramount among them the crucial ontological distinction between linguistic meaning and extra-linguistic sense (or, if Peter Newmark insists, meaning of the linguistic utterance and what the utterer means by it); followed by the difference between <u>langue</u> and <u>parole</u> (or, if J.-C. Gémar is adamant, language as a virtual system and language as actually abused).

As I pointed up above, the student should be made aware that he is not dealing with linguistic specimens but with texts, and that every text, whether oral or written, is the objective, at times distorted, or incompetent, or insufficient, and always incomplete objectivation of a subjective intention. The student must learn to treat them as such, and approach them very much like a detective looks at the scene of the crime. Words are but his circumstantial evidence of sense, which is not to be looked up in dictionaries but in the minds of speakers/writers.

A prominent place should be given to discourse analysis and the maxims of conversation, especially those of quantity, cooperation and idiomaticity (Searle 1987). Another feature to be taught is situationality - shared for the interpreter, displaced for the translator (Lvovskaya 1985, Neubert 1985, Nida 1978, Thiéry 1990). The notions of linguistic framing of communicative intentions (Neubert, 1985) and of frames and scenarios (Neubert 1985, Van Dijk 1973 and 1980) I find essential as well. In short all the factors and parameters that speakers and writers, readers and listeners bring consciously or unconsciously to bear in the way they communicate through language, and that translators and interpreters should know and use. Many an intuitive translator/interpreter does precisely that, I for one used to. But an institution should not leave it to their students' intuition; I would have become a better professional, in a shorter time and with more sanity had someone taught me what I was forced to discover on my intuitive own.

Many a theory-loathing practitioner argues that T&I are arts requiring a natural talent which cannot be taught, so there is no point in teaching them... or writing or reading about them. But the same can be said of music, and, for that matter, math. No school of medicine or architecture purport to instill talent or to be able to turn an inept student into an adept professional. What they do is teach the knowledge and guide the practice. That is also perfectly within the grasp of a T&I institution.

Another argument against T&I theory goes that speaking and writing are in nature, whereas building bridges and operating tumours are not. Possibly, but the same practitioner I heard it from likes to jog, and though he won't pick up an issue of Meta he has quite a profuse library on jogging, which is far more "natural" than conference interpreting. The extent of sophistry some colleagues will resort to in order not to read is only comparable to the obduracy with which children look for a rationale for not doing their homework.

Above, I referred to the General Anatomy of language; what do I mean by that? The translator/interpreter ought to know his active and passive languages in and out. He should be in a position to be consulted on any aspect thereof. If it is true that the student should come to the institution with his languages well in his pocket, it is a serious mistake to think that he will know them the way he really should; and I am not referring to mistaken competence or specious ability. Even the most accomplished amateur performer has to re-learn his instrument in a conservatory: it is not enough to play all the right notes (you don't need a teacher for that), but to play them the right way. Even the most gifted students have to re-learn language the right way, i.e. as a scientific object and not merely a reflex.

Languages, therefore, must be taught scientifically. The skill at speaking them may be taken for granted (at the institution's own risk, naturally), but the knowledge of them cannot possibly be: no private teacher, no high school, no school of law can have instilled it. Many have said, and, up to a point, rightly so, that T&I institutions are not language schools; but the "linguistic" knowledge can neither be discounted nor dismissed. My friend Mariano García Landa finds me too much of a "linguistophile". He is both right and wrong. As a rule, the translator, and more particularly the interpreter, need not really "know" a lot of linguistics; they must simply be able to understand well, analyse intelligently, and write or talk with a reasonable degree of competence. But I am expecting more than that: I am aiming at the specialist at "mediated interlingual communication".

The intellectual process of translation must, of course, be the centrepiece of the whole exercise. There are several models that can be usefully followed, but, to my mind, all of them should be centred on the concept of deverbalisation, brilliantly propounded by the Paris school and standard-bearers D. Seleskovitch, M. Lederer and K. Dejean Leféal (pace Wolfram Wilss and Peter Newmark). A very useful device is that of the four levels of language management proposed by Delisle (1980) - conventions of writing, lexical exegesis, interpretation of the stylistic load, and textual organicity; and within the second one, the three degrees of interpretation: transcoding, reactivation of existing linguistic elements, and contextual recreation, to which I add a fourth, that of overriding translator's competence, applied in the case of most badly written or uttered texts: disregarding the linguistic framing, inferring the intended sense incompetently conveyed and suitably expressing it in the translation.

This practical approach should go hand in hand with the theoretical conceptualisation. The students should be asked to read on T&I and to be aware of the evolution of our discipline and of existing schools of thought, even those conflicting with the one espoused by the institution or the teacher. They should also be asked to write about T&I. The notion of text typology, and with it the typology of their translations, must be instilled as well; with at least some attention to extreme cases, such as dubbing, subtitling, and advertising.

Lastly, the student must understand that his encyclopaedia is more important than his dictionary, as M. Lederer so admirably puts it. The institution cannot hope to "teach" all the knowledge of the world the would-be translator or interpreter shall need, but they can give the basics of several disciplines, demand that their students keep abreast of what is going on in the planet and encourage them never to stop widening their lore.

So far, what both translators and interpreters should learn together. Their curricula rightly branch off when the specifics

of oral versus written communication come into play. The translator ought to be versed, for instance, in the poetics and rhetoric of his languages, and be able, among other things, to detect and reproduce literary allusions. He should have, in all, a thorough command of the techniques of drafting, among which one of the most important and least considered is the art of proper rhematisation, the correct syntactic placement of the themes and rhemes of sentence and discourse.

The interpreter, on his hand, must be duly conversant with the uses of oral speech - first and foremost intonation and pause management. Condensation and abstracting must be his most valuable weapons. He should be trained in maximising the use of extra-linguistic clues and intonation in order to save breath; for instance, conveying modal information suprasegmentally. He should be cognisant as well of the competing efforts of hearing/analysing, processing and uttering (Gile 1985 and 1988) and try and master them in that order. The interpreter must be made to understand that an unintelligible interpretation, even if "linguistically" unimpeachable, is a useless interpretation; and that a useless interpretation is, by definition, a bad interpretation. He must be aware that he is not paid to understand, or to speak, but to be understood.

Again, stress should be made on the typology of oral texts and their interpretations: the political conference setting, the technical seminar setting, the judicial setting; informative texts, descriptive texts, narrative texts; the flowery and the utterly incompetent texts; etc.

A fact, to my knowledge, consistently overlooked is that of the anatomy of the phonatory organs. The interpreter should know how his tool works and how to take care of it. The first thing a training institution should do for him is groom his voice. Like a singer or an actor, he will have to make a living out of his throat, speaking contra natura and in often extreme conditions.

Coming back full circle, the would-be interpreter must understand that he cannot hope to improve his languages or his translational skills in the booth. For that he requires the desk, the dictionary, the grammar, the encyclopaedia. He must be encouraged to go on translating if he can, if nothing else as sheer practice.

Last but not least, both translators and interpreters should be encouraged to keep abreast of developments in their field by subscribing to publications such as Meta, Target, Babel or The Interpreters' Newsletter, and attending refresher courses and professional conferences.

The argument goes that one thing is to teach a surgeon to translate, and quite another to teach a translator to operate.

Viewed this way, translation, even successful translation, looks much easier than medicine. The fallacy lies in that by teaching a physician to translate, we are not doing the equivalent of teaching a translator to operate, but of teaching him to treat a wound or mend a bone; and that is something men have been doing for time immemorial without any need for literacy. Sure enough, most translations can be accomplished by superficially qualified practitioners, exactly the same way most colds can be treated by a nurse. Now, it is definitely not so difficult to turn a translator into a nurse; easier, perhaps, than making a translator out of a neurosurgeon.

Am I advocating that all institutions henceforth shutter their students in for six to nine years? Not at all. But I do expect them to become aware of this technician-professional-theorist triad I have been in essence harping upon and find their place within it. It would be as utopian to demand that all translators know linguistics and translatology as it would to require that only physicians administer injections. But the pyramid must be erected for us too: the sheer the superficially trained, mostly intuitive practitioner, the full-fledged professional translator/interpreter, the translatologist.

As with physicians and engineers, it is up to us, professional practitioners and researchers, to institute our pyramid, except that most of our colleagues are not up to it or do not care a hoot anyway. It is then the task of us, who take the time and trouble to think and read and write; who have the guts to submit our thoughts to our peers; who have the patience and interest to listen and discuss them; who will even spend our own money in order to help the cause, to start the thankless but urgent job of putting our profession on the same academic, scientific, social and financial level as that of the rest of our professional peers.

To wind up then, translators and interpreters, colleagues that they are indeed, must become friends and allies in the hard battle to upgrading the profession, improve the craft, help develop theory, mold the young, and establish that sorely needed link between theory, research, observation and practice every self-respecting college profession should ensure.

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